

Jim Bishop

Historical rumor is the hardest thing in world to lay to rest

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Historical rumor is difficult to destroy. My father believed that John Wilkes Booth, tracked to Garrett's barn after shooting Abraham Lincoln, was not shot and killed by a witless soldier named Boston Corbett. Why?



"Because grandpa told me he sneaked away and lived to a ripe old age in Oklahoma Territory, that's why."

Untrue. He was buried beneath the flagstones at the capital prison. Years later, his brother Edwin, famed Shakespearean actor, identified the remains and effects of Wilkes. John Wilkes Booth was buried beside his mother in Baltimore.

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WE HAVE BEEN TOLD that Franklin Roosevelt, doddering and dying, sold his country out at the Yalta Conference. Untrue. He was doddering and dying, yes, but his wits were sharp.

He faced Josef Stalin, with Winston Churchill, to attain three goals: (1) To get the Russians to declare war on Japan within 90 days after Germany surrendered; (2) to limit Russian spoils after the war and keep her out of China; (3) to get the suspicious Russians to agree to

join an organization called the United Nations.

I researched this and other aspects of Roosevelt's decline in a book called "FDR's Last Year." I say this because I spent three years interviewing his cronies and reading hitherto secret papers.

FDR got most of what he asked. Stalin agreed to send his troops eastward to fight Japan so that a million American lives might not be lost in landings on the Japanese mainland. When he made the agreement, Roosevelt did not know that Russia had a desire to fight Japan — not to help Roosevelt, but to be in on the kill and claim the Kurile Islands and two warm-water ports in Manchuria.

After much repetitious argument, Russia agreed to join the U.N. if one negative vote in the Security Council could nullify anything the U.N. proposed. The reason for this was valid — Stalin knew that the U.N. would be stacked with friends of the United States and Great Britain — and they could and would outvote the Soviet Union at any time.

What FDR lost was Poland. Stalin kept reminding the President and the prime minister that twice in one century the Germans had raced across the Polish plains to attack Russia. It could not happen again.

Stalin wanted "friendly governments" (satellites) in Poland, Romania, Hungary, Czechoslovakia,

Yugoslavia and Bulgaria. This, in effect, would sanitize Russia from attack from the west. Churchill roared that England went to war to save Poland from the Germans and would not hand it over to Russia without a struggle.

Roosevelt said the days of "spheres of influence" were over, even for Great Britain. Besides, he said, he had 7 million Poles in the United States who voted as a unit. Stalin stunned him by saying, "You haven't got 7 million. You haven't got 5 million who vote."

Russia got her satellites. She declared war on Japan. The atom bomb worked and the United States didn't need Russia. The Soviet Union joined the U. N. and agreed to talk instead of fight. Russia kept out of China except for Manchurian port leases. Who won at Yalta? Who lost? You be the jury.

TEN YEARS AGO, I crouched in the School Book Depository window where Lee Harvey Oswald fired shots at President John F. Kennedy's motorcade. I spent five years researching the events of one day. If I could have hinted Oswald was part of a conspiracy, that there was a second gunman, anything other than the truth, I would have had a runaway best-seller. I'd be rich.

But it wasn't so. Oswald bought the gun. Oswald, sitting on a metal counter on Nov. 21, studied a newspaper bought by another School Book Depository employee, and saw

the diagram of the Kennedy parade route.

It would pass this building at lunchtime. He brought his rifle to work the following day, built a screen of empty cartons, sat in a low-ledge window, and fired three shots.

One bounced off the pavement and splattered the face of a motorist on the far side of the underpass. He felt stung, his hands rubbed his cheek and found blood. Another shot hit Kennedy's lower neck muscles from behind, tumbled through the trachea in front, and spun through Gov. John Connally's chest, hitting his left wrist and stopping on his thigh.

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THE THIRD CAUGHT Kennedy in the right rear of his head. Five and a quarter inches of skull and hair flew up from the car and backward. Among the few who have seen the presidential head and neck X-rays, and the detailed autopsy report, are John K. Lattimer, M.D., Sc. D., and two confreres — all of Columbia University.

The majority did not believe the Warren Commission Report that it was one man, one gun.

They believe now. If you want the truth, not rumor, write to: John K. Lattimer, M.D., Columbia University, College of Physicians and Surgeons in New York City for a reprint of his recent article in "Medical Times." Rumor is harder to disprove than an outright lie.